

# ASSESSMENT CENTRES

## What are they?

Assessment Centres are a series of exercises and tasks used by recruiters to assess and score candidates. They're often used by employers who are recruiting a large number of people at a similar time. They are less commonly used for a single job hire or a short term or casual opportunity.

Assessment Centres can last from a few hours to a few days. Often employers will pay for your travel and accommodation if the assessment centre isn't local to where you live.

The kind of exercises and tasks you might encounter at an assessment centre include:

- Presentations and group exercises
- Work simulation tests
- Interviews and psychometric tests
- Informal social events

## General preparation

- Understand what they're looking for: make sure you're familiar with any published selection criteria, as they'll be using these to 'score' candidates. Criteria might include competencies like leadership, communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning, influencing and commercial awareness.
- Research the company (and competitors), industry, role and the details of the opportunity on offer.
- Re-read the application materials you've sent them so far.
- Plan which examples you might use if they ask you for examples of their competencies/criteria.
- Take our Practice Assessment Centre exercise on [reading.ac.uk/careers/graduatesfirst](https://reading.ac.uk/careers/graduatesfirst).

## Presentations

- Check instructions that you've been given such as time allowed, format, technology and audience.
- Structure your presentation with a beginning, middle and end.
- Give an overview of what you're going to cover during your opening.
- Give a summary of what you've covered during your end stage.
- Create clear, simple, concise visuals, with a professional font.
- Only use images that you have the rights and permissions to use.
- Plan for tech failure: for example, back-up files on a USB drive and/or paper copies.
- Practice your presentation until you don't need notes, then practice in front of friends/family – ask them to check that you're making eye contact and smiling. Offer to take questions at the end.
- You can find useful further tips on [TargetJobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk).

## Group exercises

- Show that you're a good team player – offer ideas, listen to others, and help the group progress the task. This exercise is all about showing how you work with others.
- You'll have people observing you and noting down evidence against the competencies they're looking for. Make sure you speak up, so they have evidence to write down!
- Some ways to start contributing more include letting the group know how much time is left, summarising how far the group has got, listing what's left to do and suggesting ideas.
- Good team players let other people speak and have ideas too; if there's a quiet person in your group, you could offer them an opportunity to share their thoughts, and check group consensus when you're agreeing on an idea or decision.

## Work simulation tasks (e.g. Case studies, role plays and in-tray exercises)

- Know the job description: work simulations test how well you can do typical duties of the job. They will be different depending on the job: for example, you might be asked to analyse data if you're applying for a role with data analysis, or **role play** a negotiation if you're applying for a role where you'd need to negotiate. Consider what parts of the job description might form part of an exercise.
- Read advance information: they might give you a clue about how you could prepare. For example, if they mention a business **case study**, you could read up on advice for business case studies.
- On the day make sure you read and understand the instructions, plan your time and act as if it was real (e.g. don't ask to 'stop' a role play halfway through, proofread any document you've written etc.).
- In-tray (also called e-tray) exercises** simulate being at a busy desk with lots of information to manage. Usually the task is to decide what to do: judging what actions need to be taken, prioritising and then doing what is required. This might, for example, include writing some email responses, drafting documents or compiling or using a spreadsheet. Come up with a rationale for what you're going to do once you've assessed the situation (you might be asked about this afterwards).

## Interviews and psychometric tests

- Read full advice on these areas in our *Interviews, Psychometric Tests and Sample interview questions and techniques* information sheets, available at [reading.ac.uk/careers](http://reading.ac.uk/careers)
- Practice to improve your timing, familiarity and confidence: use our [Graduates First](#) resource.

## Informal social events

- Be friendly but professional: until you go home, even the informal elements, like meals or meetings with recent hires, are a chance to make a good impression.
- Show your interpersonal skills, ask questions to employees as well as other candidates. Many employers aim to recruit around half of the candidates they invite to assessment centre, and so there's a good chance these might be future colleagues around you. Enjoy getting to know them!